Corey Willis and Amari Coleman

ENG 201

Mrs. Wednt

4-1-16

The Media Difference

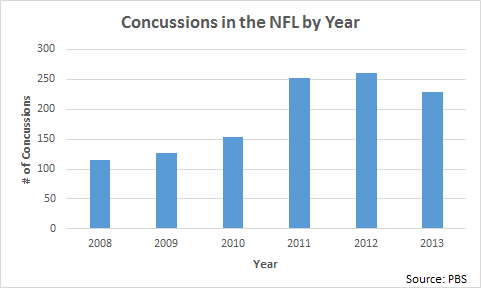
        In America, the biggest influence this country has is the media. The media has the ability to make a good thing great, or it has the ability to make a bad thing devastating. In American culture the biggest sport for the past twenty or thirty years has been football. To say football is big in the United States is a understatement, the top 12 shows of the 2015 fall season were all NFL games. (Chase, 1) It’s safe to say the NFL in America owns the fall season. With the NFL making 7.24 billion dollars last year, it can be hard to believe they’re in danger of going out of business. Everyone knows the risk of playing football, but no one really knows how high of a risk it is. Over the last ten years or so several football players have brought to light a problem that no one was talking about before. “Several NFL players in recent years have taken their own lives, with autopsies showing brain damage consistent with routine hits to the head; Studies have found that former NFL players who’ve sustained several concussions are more likely to suffer from ailments like clinical depression or Alzheimer’s disease.”(Drummond, 1) With the media finding a link between concussions and possible brain later in life, it didn’t take long for the NFL to be swarming with reporters with plenty of questions. With all these questions revolving around the league it was obvious that the NFL had to take action. The NFL reached a 765 million dollar settlement over concussion- related brain injuries. More than 4,500 former athletes suffering from dementia, depression, or Alzheimer’s sued the league. They accused the league of concealing the dangers of concussions, and forcing some back on the field too soon after a concussion. With this lawsuit coming into place, it might be a glimpse of what’s to come for the NFL. With the media shading this problem the way that it is, a lot of parents have pulled their kids from playing football at early ages. Also, some players such as Patrick Willis and Calvin Johnson have decided to cut their career significantly short due to the risk of injury. With all of this negative energy circling around the NFL, it’s safe to say the National Football League is in big trouble. But what can the league do to fix this problem? In this paper looking back into the past of football is important. We wanted to see was there a difference in the way concussions were handled back in the day? Or is there just a difference in media outlets.

In order to figure out where the NFL has to go we tried to figure out what event lead them to this point. Doing the research, it was obvious what the difference was over time, and the difference was media. Concussions have always been around the game of football since it started in 1920. It’s hard to find a lot of information about injuries in sports prior to that point. However once ESPN took off in 1979, the game was changed forever. Now people had a way to access sports 24/7 all year around. This was great for the NFL’s pocket but it was also a negative in some ways. Not every minute of the day can be filled with exciting new sports news, therefore a lot of times something that’s not that big of a deal gets blown out of proportion. So if there’s a problem as big as a concussion, the media with blow it up to new heights. 1994 was one of those years for the NFL thanks to the media. Also, in 1994 the NFL most watched team was the Dallas Cowboys so when the Cowboys were in the NFC championship game, safe to say the whole world was watching. Dallas’ quarterback and one of NFL’s biggest names Troy Aikman took a knee to the head during the game and had to go to the hospital. (After the game Aikman told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel that he couldn’t the whole game.) Aikman now says, “I didn’t know what planet I was on. I still to this day have no recollection of ever having played in that game”. (Ezell, 1) This was a huge moment for the NFL because this was the biggest concussion controversy the media ever got the chance to dissect. The media talked about this controversy for two weeks straight debating weather Aikman should be allowed to play in the super bowl. The super bowl is the biggest game in the NFL, and it’s the game every football player dreams of playing in. Aikman didn’t remember one play from the football game two weeks prior and suited up to play in the super bowl, which they won by his leadership. No one will ever know how that decision affected Troy Aikman, but I know that controversy changed the NFL forever.

In 1999 the NFL would take another big hit after former player Mike Webster claimed that playing football gave him dementia. After years of struggling with everyday life things Mike Webster decided to file a disability application with the NFL Retirement Board. The NFL Retirement Board rules Mike Webster permanently disabled after the came to a conclusion of him playing in the NFL caused him to get dementia. The NFL made a mistake by trying to cover up the situation, because it made them look horrible when ESPN cracked the story. It made the NFL look like it was trying to hide something, which it was. Three years later in 2002 Dr. Bennet Omalu decides to look deeper into Mike Webster’s brain. Dr. Bennet Omalu was and still is the single most hated person in the NFL. He was the doctor that studied a lot of brains of deceased former football players. Eventually Dr. Bennett discovered the first case of a brain disease that had never been identified in football players. The disease is called Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE). This disease was first found in Mike Webster and now can be the thing that brings a billion-dollar business down.

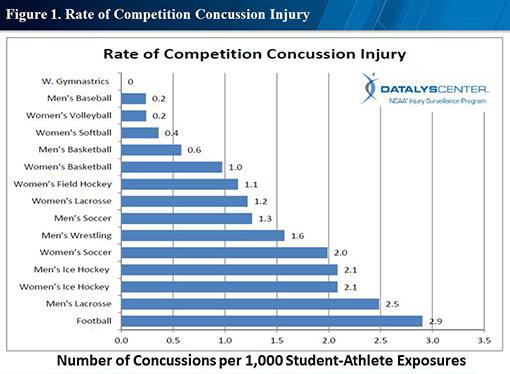
When football first started in America there was very little research done on concussions because everyone just thought it was apart of the game. Back in the day they would call a concussion just “getting your bell rung”. It was seen as a good thing if you were a defensive player and you had a headache after the game that means you were hitting people hard, which is the goal. As football went along the players got bigger and faster and so did the headaches. There were two articles that spoke of concussions and the way language has changed the way the sport has changed in the article *Concussion talk no longer taboo in the NFL* written by Jack Brewer speaks of how the NFL language used to be opposed to today. “Talking about concussions used to be taboo in the locker room and players would laugh and high five when another player was knocked out or woozy from a big hit. Now, players get concerned when this happens. The concussion debate and NFL settlement lawsuit has changed the culture of the NFL when it comes to brain injuries”, Brewer stated. This problem has only a known within the last 15 years. So the language between teammates changed drastically strictly from the recently exposed knowledge. Another article stated the same kind of point how the language has changed over the years of gaining knowledge on the seriousness of concussions. The article *Marvin Lewis says the most tone-deaf thing about concussions* posted by Darin Garntt spoke of how he felt about one of his players and their “concussion situation”. “[Well, he had a concussion against Atlanta](http://www.cincinnati.com/story/blogs/2014/10/15/lewis-concussions-linger-longer-now/17306033/),” Lewis said of their Sept. 14 game. “That’s that biggest concern that way. You don’t want him to have, you know, but again I coached defenses and linebackers for a long time and concussions didn’t linger. Now we have found that because of the media and things they seem to linger longer. There’s a lot of attention paid to it. I don’t know why they linger longer. I don’t remember them lingering like they do now.”

For our primary research we interviewed two Central Michigan University Football Athletic Trainers with a combination of over 40 years under their belt. We decided to set up this interview because we wanted to know how they felt about the “increase” of concussions and how much things have changed since when they first arrived. Being reliable sources, we thought we could get some great information from them. We interviewed Joe Fox and Greg McGillvary of Central Michigan University and asked them a few questions on the topics of how the concern of concussions have changed over the years and if its changed their perspective on the game. Joe Fox states that “Given that I started 5 years ago, there hasn’t been any drastic changes really. The most change happened around 10 years ago when legislation in the NCAA and NFL made their players and everyone aware of concussions and how they affect the brain”. Greg states that, “Concussions have always been a big factor but, more awareness and research has been gathered over the years on long-term ramifications and evaluation of repeated concussions”. Both of these statements were clearly stating that it has always been a problem but just knew awareness has been brought to light on the topic. Both the NFL and NCAA had prior knowledge to this problem but not to this extent. Joe Fox answered the second question by stating that “Not really, concussions have always been a part of the game but, were handled differently. The biggest change was the process of returning to play after you get your first one. In the past they used to call it getting your bell rung and the players would go back in the game after a couple of plays but, now there are many more evaluations and steps that are taken before taking the field again the field.” Greg stated “No I don’t think so. We all know that football is a high speed collision sport and not just contact. Other sports such as soccer, basketball, and volleyball are contact sports and they sometimes have collisions as well. Its just a part of the sport”. They both state that the game is a sport like no other and is a collision sport and not just contact. When playing football, the players know the risk that they are playing for. At any moment you can lose your life while playing this game and is a high-risk sport but other sport also has collisions and are not a lot safer.



<http://www.symptoms101.net/tag/nfl-concussion-graph>

The graph above shows the concussion rate in the NFL from 2008 to 2013. Clearly the concussion rate has increased within the years and should not be taken lightly and hasn’t been. In 2012, there were an all time high of 275 reported concussions. This research above may be happening because of the evolution of athletes becoming bigger and stronger than ever.



<http://www.ncaa.org/health-and-safety/medical-conditions/ssi-task-force-explores-issues-challenges-around-concussions>

The graph above shows the concussion rate per thousand of all NCAA sports including practice and actual games during the year 2013. Football is the leader in concussion in all areas of sports but there are many close to the same number. The evolution of athletes may be the reason for this by them getting bigger, faster, and stronger.